

STORY OF A CANNONEER

Reminiscences of a Detached Volunteer
in a Regular Battery.

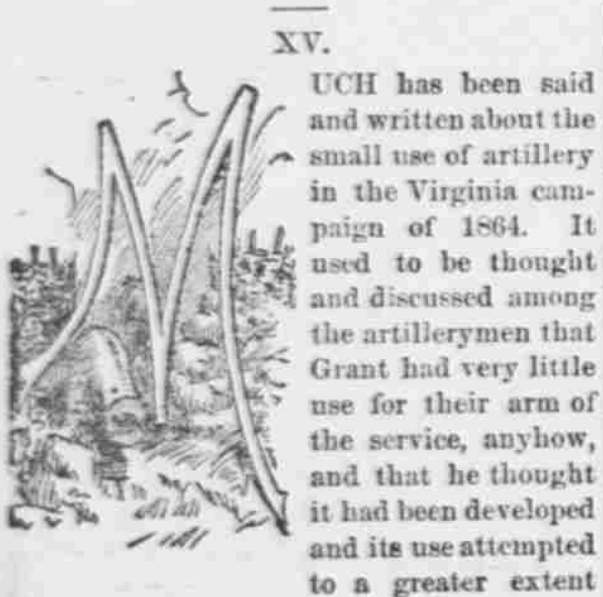
GRANT AND ARTILLERY.

Had to Stand Idle While the In-
fantry Floundered to Death.

RESUME OF THE CAMPAIGN

Charging the Rebel Lines in
Front of Petersburg.

(Continued, 1888.)



UCH has been said and written about the small use of artillery in the Virginia campaign of 1864. It used to be thought and discussed among the artillerymen that Grant had very little use for the arm of the service, anyhow, and that he thought it had been developed and its use attempted to a greater extent

than was advantageous in previous campaigns of the Army of the Potomac. It was well known that McClellan and Meade had placed great reliance on their artillery, and when we crossed the Rappahannock it was undoubtedly the most perfectly organized force of that arm in the world.

But Grant was credited in the campaign of the time with all sorts of disparaging remarks about it. He was quoted as saying that "artillery was useful in a country where the roads were good, wide expanses of open fields and plenty of commanding positions, where numbers of batteries could be massed at critical moments, etc.; but in a region like that between the Rappahannock and the James, it was not only of little use, but generally a positive incumbrance; that it required large and expensive trains for its ammunition and forage; that owing to the dense woods and narrow roads it could not be used with effect corresponding to the trouble of maintaining it," and all that sort of thing.

On the other hand, artillery officers said that "the reason why Grant did not prop-



SHOOTING THE STRETCH-BEARERS.

erly value that arm was because he did not know how to use it, but preferred the simpler method of shoving his infantry into the brush, to kill as many rebels as possible, while they were all getting killed themselves," and so on.

I suppose there was some foundation for this feeling on both sides. In the Wilderness it was a sad spectacle to see our superb Fifth Corps batteries, manned as they were with redoubtable veterans, and eager to "turn loose their war dogs," compelled to stand idle 36 hours in the Lacey clearing or at the Wilderness Tavern, while our devoted infantry was floundering to certain death, unaided, right in front of us, in impassable thickets or swamps; while a little to our left were massed the 50 guns of Hancock's Corps, behind the Brock road, in a state of almost equal idleness. It may be inquired why we did not search the woods with case-shot or shell, as we had so often done on other fields, many of them heavily timbered? I cannot answer this question. When we saw there idle in the Lacey clearing, and saw our infantry repeatedly driven back out of the brush on the south side of the pike, we asked one another "Why don't they

LET US MAKE A LITTLE HELL of those thickets for a while?" We had room on the knoll south of the Lacey House to form at least five batteries facing west and southwest, toward those thickets, and we could have thrown shell and case clear to the further edge of them and into the Chevington and Hagerson clearings beyond. Grant himself and Meade also were at the Lacey House during portions of both days (5th and 6th of May), and they could not have helped seeing this opportunity. I am sure we could have made those thickets very uncomfortable if not wholly untenable for the enemy. It would have required a good deal of ammunition, but we had plenty of that, and I have always thought it was a mistake that, after the enemy's presence there was developed in great force, we were not permitted to "see what we could do" for a couple of hours at least. Perhaps the brush was so dense that we could not have produced a decisive effect, but we could have "shown our good will," and I have never seen brush dense enough to make an exploding 12-pound case-shot anything but a most undesirable neighbor.

If we had had our way the eight batteries of the Fifth Corps would have been put into position from the Lacey House to the back of the Wilderness Run, and we would have

"THE MILK IN THE COCOANUT."



GREEDY OLD JOHN BULL to his American myrmidons: That's the way, my importing. Rebel Copperhead, Free Whiskey friends. Go right ahead. Cut down that revenue tree and crack those Pension and Surplus nuts. You can have the shells, in welcome, but I want the milk to fatten my own people.

searched those thickets with a storm of case-shot that would have driven out the cotton-tail rabbits, not to speak of the enemy's infantry.

This might have been done at any time during the morning of the 5th of May; but after our infantry had been there two or three times and were driven out with great loss, no doubt so many of our wounded were left lying in the brush that it would have been cruel to have fired case-shot in there at random then.

I have sometimes thought that Gen. Grant expected the enemy to charge into the Lacey clearing in pursuit of our troops, and wanted to hold our batteries ready for them in that event. I don't know about those things; but I do know that all I thought then that we could have borne a much more effective hand than we did in the battle of the Wilderness, if our arm of the service had been handled differently.

Again, the 8th, 10th, and 12th of May, at Spotsylvania, the same fragmentary, indecisive method of using artillery seemed to prevail. At least five of the eight batteries of the Fifth Corps had got into the Lacey clearing, within sight of Spotsylvania Ridge, by 8 o'clock in the morning of the 8th of May, and a resolute reconnaissance by a couple of regiments of infantry would have developed the position and the strength of the enemy quite as definitely as they were uncovered by the heavy charge and bloody repulse of Robinson's Division.

Then, after Robinson was repulsed, two batteries were ordered up—Martin's or Walcott's and ours—and we sustained in the open field for half an hour or more

A DESPERATE CONFLICT.

with 12 or 14 guns of the enemy under cover and in a most advantageous position. True, we were reinforced by Mink and, later, by Kittenhouse, but not until the heaviest part of the work was over. In the position where we first went into battery the field was wide enough to form up at least five batteries, or, in close order, six; so that, instead of assailing the enemy's position at the Spindler House with 12 guns, as we did at the start, we could just as well have brought 20, if not 35, to bear on him.

But the whole tactics of that campaign seemed to be those of simple assault upon infantry. If one assault failed another was ordered, sometimes by the same troops, or when one division had been destroyed a fresh one was put in.

On the 12th of May, just as a few sections from our various batteries had fairly got to enfilading the inner faces of the west angle, we were compelled to desist, by the fact that our infantry had charged up to the outer faces and stopped there, while the rebels remained inside, the two being only the thickness of the breastwork apart; which, of course, precluded artillery fire without danger of destroying our own men. I firmly believe that we would have made that side of the angle untenable with our case-shot alone in 20 minutes if our infantry had waited.

At Jericho Ford, on the North Anna, we had a little flurry that seemed more like old times. This was when the enemy broke Cutler's Division on our extreme right, and we, being in battery west of the Fontaine House, checked and repulsed them with canister. This, while it lasted, was a rattling affair, but they did not come on like they did at Gettysburg; none of their infantry, as I recollect, coming nearer than 300 or 350 yards of our muzzles. But it was a most sundown when this occurred, and night put an end to the conflict, which was not resumed the following day.

We had no further opportunity until the 24 of June in front of Bethesda Church, as related in foregoing pages; and even there our battery was called up to do a desperate piece of work alone, while another remained in column almost within gunshot in the rear. We were never sorry that this was so, but rather preferred to have it as it was, so far as we were personally concerned. There was, as previously related, an unusual determination on the part of our Cannoneers to show what they could do, as was evinced by John McLaughlin's fierce growl when his teeth as we lifted our trail to unhook it from the pike when we unlimbered in the

road, with the enemy's canister rattling among the spokes of our wheels—"By—, we've got a chance at last!"

I refer to these things in this summary way, not to criticize old Grant, who had his own method of fighting, but simply to demonstrate that the artillery of the Army of the Potomac was not to blame for the comparatively small part it played in the great Virginia campaign of 1864.

THE ARTILLERY OF THAT ARMY—

at least the corps batteries—was never in such form or condition, either as to men or horses or material, as when it crossed the Rappahannock. Every battery dated its organization from 1861 or earlier, volunteer or Regular, and nearly every Cannoneer was a veteran all the way from the Peninsula, Bull Run or Antietam.

But many of them marched from the Rappahannock to the James without a casualty by gunshot and some of them without firing a shot! As for the Reserve Artillery, we should have forgotten that it was in existence, if it had not been broken up and its serviceable men and horses, with a few of its batteries, sent to reinforce us after Spotsylvania.

To resume our narrative, after we had wiped out the rebel battery, and Bartlett's Brigade had driven the enemy's infantry back to the Shady Grove road, we all bivouacked in the position we had won. About sundown copious showers came up, accompanied with heavy thunder and sharp lightning, which needed only big hailstones to remind us of our canister duel in the afternoon. This rain was most welcome, because it cooled the air, laid the dust and filled the hollows with pure water, which we had sadly lacked for several days. It wet us all to the skin, but we did not care about that; in fact we enjoyed it—in fact it was the first "bath" we had had for a fortnight. Griffin's Division held its ground that night and the next day (June 3) until afternoon, when, hearing of the great repulse of the Second, Sixth and Eighteenth Corps down to the left, we withdrew to the works about the church. 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